18- 24 February 2024 God’s good news of a covenant

Genesis 9: 8-17

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New International Version

**8**Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: **9**“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you **10**and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. **11**I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

**12**And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: **13**I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. **14**Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, **15**I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. **16**Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

**17**So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

**Bible notes**

The stories in the early chapters of Genesis set out the ancient Israelite understanding of the relationship between God and creation: God is the source of all creation; creation is good; creation is ordered; humankind is made in God’s image and tasked with caring for God’s creation; living in a way that is out of step with God has disastrous results.

Many ancient cultures have flood stories that, in one way or another, are the judgement of the gods on the wayward human population. In this version, Noah is the one bit of light in an otherwise dark world. The widespread destruction caused by the flood enables a reset, a fresh start for creation, led by the one family that had remained in step with God. The months spent in the ark, while quickly read, were no brief moment and would have been a character-forming time!

On release from the ark, Noah’s first response is to make an offering to God, perhaps out of gratitude, perhaps as an act of dedication. God makes several promises that give future security to humankind. These promises are sealed with the covenant set out in today’s reading: a contract, a formal agreement between two parties, in this case between God and humankind – present and future. While such a contract would normally have responsibilities on either side, this covenant has no conditions attached. God’s love for God’s creation is such that, having enabled this fresh start, humankind will never again experience such a judgement. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth and all humankind. The rainbow is a memory-trigger: when we see it, we see a thing of beauty, a reminder of God’s faithfulness, a promise of a future.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Rainbows are caused by light travelling through water droplets. The light bends and bounces through the droplet, separating out into its different wavelengths, each a different colour, producing a rainbow of colours ordered according to the wavelength. But we don’t need to understand how a rainbow works in order to appreciate its beauty, just as we don’t need to understand how or why God provides us with fresh starts in order to be grateful and make use of them. And, again without needing to know how, we can see that the light interacting with the droplets transforms them. Perhaps our fresh starts, too, come when we are transformed by the Light of the World.

Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| A field of purple flowers  Description automatically generated |  |

**Questions**

* This valley flowers every three to ten years and only after a flood – what thoughts does that stir in you?
* Why is the rainbow after ‘The Flood’ a sign of God’s covenant?
* What does God’s promise mean to you?

## Prayer

*Adapt to your local context.*

**A prayer of praise**

Response after each phrase: **We praise you.**

Living God, with the crescent moon and the rising sun:
with the singing birds and the roaring waves:
with your creatures in the forests and the creatures in the fields:
with our friends and family around our tables and our brothers and sisters around our world:
for your promises, your love and your faithfulness:
**Amen.**

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

God of new beginnings,
your undying, tender love is truly amazing.
You sustain the whole universe with what is needed for life.
You trust us humans to care for that life.
We often fail,
but your love reaches out a hand to pick us up,
to help us start again.
Thank you. Amen.